



Panther Update

May 2009

Big Cat Field Stories

Underpasses are About Life. Photos by Florida Panther Posse (Field Cameras), April 2009

Underpasses save wildlife, panther lives, and even *human* lives. The FGCU “Wings of Hope” Florida Panther Posse field cams (infrared motion cameras) are documenting the presence of a multitude of wildlife species including black bear, white-tailed deer, armadillo, bobcat, wild turkey, coyote, and of course Florida panthers traveling through underpasses.



Above: the Curled Tail, a Visible Symptom of the Florida Panther’s Decreased Genetic Diversity

Below: the Spots are not Entirely Faded from this Cat’s Pelage, Indicating the Panther is a Yearling
Panther Refuge Underpass



White-Tailed Deer: the Panther’s Elegant Preferred Prey
FPNWR Refuge Cabin

Two “Possecams” are currently set up inside underpasses: one at Alico/Corkscrew and the other near the Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge on HWY 29. The Posse shares these photos with biologists in the area who monitor the numbers and locations of Florida panthers for their research and management of the population. The photos also help demonstrate the effectiveness of these expensive underpasses. The Florida Panther Posse stresses that actually underpasses are priceless because of the human and wildlife lives saved from death and injury through the corresponding reduction in wildlife/vehicle collisions.

The need for strategically-placed underpasses and fencing was highlighted again recently when **a young female panther (approximately three years old) was struck and killed on US 41 in Big Cypress National Preserve near Turner River, Collier County, on April 9.** Steve Schulze, of BCNP, who investigated the mortality, commented “This is the fifth panther (4 females) documented killed in this immediate vicinity.” The panther death marks the sixth known panther mortality for 2009, five of which have been caused by collisions with vehicles. Laurie Macdonald, Florida Program Director for Defenders of Wildlife stated, “Today’s tragic incident is deeply upsetting because it could have been avoided if there had been wildlife crossings and fencing in the area. The panther killed today was a breeding age female panther - a critically important individual in the very small wild panther population – and she was killed along a road segment where a wildlife crossing has been proposed.” For more information on this panther’s death and proposed underpasses in the area see: <http://www.naplesnews.com/news/2009/apr/10/panther-advocates-call-solution-stretch-road-respo/>



Night and Day; Panther and Prey
Alico/Corkscrew Underpass

Talking with Panthers by Mark Lotz, FWC Panther Biologist

It was April 9th, in the afternoon on the Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge. I had been working with their biologist, Larry Richardson through the morning and being in the neighborhood, decided to go check in on FP113. FP113 had been hanging around a relatively small area (near Fritz and Ridge Roads - trails on the refuge). I didn't think she was denning; it wasn't that confined of an area. So I was curious. Upon approaching her location, I noticed tracks on top of our buggy tracks from an hour earlier and picked a convenient spot to stand quietly and listen to her (radio signal). After about forty minutes, I heard her yowl. It was an "estrous yowl." FP113 wasn't mating; but was in heat. About twenty minutes later she vocalized again and then settled in a cool maple/cypress mix of woods. I moved in closer and found a nice cabbage stump to sit on in a burned pine area.

About forty-five minutes later she began yowling again and, as I could tell by the signal, was starting to move. There was a little patch of willow jutting out from the maple head and she followed that "cool zone" (shaded cover as opposed to the open pines) into the willows. Directly she yowled again and this time was about sixty feet away! She was so close I knew she'd be able to hear me so I called to her using a whistle-like call. FP113 chirped back at me and continued yowling. I caused her to call back two more times before finally getting a look at her! She emerged through the open burned pines, yowling and striding at the same time. She never turned her head in my direction; just yowled her way back into the maples. That's the first time I've seen that, although I've heard them yowling and breeding on several occasions. I guess FP113 figured it was just a good spot to pick up a boyfriend. Not a bad afternoon.

NEWSFLASH! Almost 30K acres of panther habitat burned in BCNP and the Refuge in the final days of April. Look for photos and an article entitled, "Smoked Panthers" in next month's issue. See this NDN article for photos and information regarding firefighting efforts. <http://www.naplesnews.com/news/2009/apr/29/these-hotshots-know-how-fight-back-against-wildfir/>

What Humans are Doing

Congressman Alcee L. Hastings has been awarded the Florida Panther Protection Award on April 23, from the Conservancy of Southwest Florida for his efforts to protect the Florida panther from extinction. <http://www.americanchronicle.com/articles/view/99871>

Where's the Hope for the Panther's Long Term Survival?

It lies with our youth. And requires education. The "Wings of Hope" Florida Panther Posse Program of Florida Gulf Coast University addresses this opportunity beautifully in Lee and Collier Counties. It's a creative, upbeat, energetic program of classroom and field activities reaching over four thousand elementary students every year. Then, as a course requirement, each student educates two other people. Five hundred FGCU students assist with the teaching for community service credits. In the process, those college students develop an appreciation for South Florida's wildlife, environment, and water conservation as well. Do the math. That's over 12,000 people annually turned on to the wonder and importance of the Florida Panther's ecosystem. Congratulations to Ricky Pires, Director, her staff, and CREW partners on the completion of a successful 2008/09 Program.



Ricky Pires with "Panther Biologist" Posse Kids at CREW (<http://www.crewtrust.org/>)
April 2009

What You Can Do This Month

The Panther Posse would like you to remember that panthers do not live, rest, or hunt in trees. They only climb occasionally to escape danger. Visit their website below, learn more about the program, panthers, underpasses, and donate if you can.

<http://www.fgcu.edu/CAS/WingsofHope/index.html>

Special Thanks To.....

Layne Hamilton, [Florida Panther and Ten Thousand Islands NWR](#)

Mark Lotz, [Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission](#)

Deborah Jansen, [Big Cypress National Preserve](#)

Ricky Pires, [Wings of Hope](#)

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